

ENTERING THE CILL RIALAIG LANDSCAPE

Here's a place for the ages: cliffs facing a bay
bathed in perpetual grave gray. Even on days
with sun, rain clouds are always on the way. Always
waves—racing in—fail to contain themselves. The weight
of the North Atlantic presses them, gales of wind
push them to break against the base of the cliffs.
But waves can't be destroyed so they're raised as spray
and raging foam. Way out on the wavering horizon,
fog fades to mist, mist pales to water-filled rays
of light, traces of the last storm's passage, the coming
grace of sun. All the while, two men in a lone bobbing boat
wait for fish in the midst of the bay. Sheep and cows
graze along the tops of the cliffs. Wind rakes the ferns.

*

Isn't it the sweep of it? Why I keep turning to keep
it all in my head, the eternally seething sea
between these cliffs of grieving wet stone and the distant
light-streaked line underneath the enormous domed clouds,
clouds that allow brief moments of sun and then release
sheets of rain. Mist and fog in the sweep west to east,
erasing the far hills and islands. Look again,
they're re-emerging while the sea's suspended
in each wave as it breathes in, gathers and heaves itself
against the cliffs, erupting like fireworks into mist.
And that's if there's only a breeze. When the wind picks up,
it can beat so wildly I can't even think. Yet sheep
go on eating grass and weeds amidst their stone
enclosures. I can see an oratory's ruins
above me, an abbey's below. I'm so small here
I could evaporate into the weep of rain.

*

Yes, it's how wide the sky is, how high it rises,
the far horizon dividing earth from air, fine line
at times shining white light, at times impossible
to define as rain clouds and rain and fog lie on top.
High tide or low, there's never silence. Wild waves
of wind, wild waves of sea hike themselves up
the cliffs' sides. Magpies find and fly the thermals.
This site the pious sought. Their rocks remain:

(continued, no stanza break)

ENTERING THE CILL RIALAIG LANDSCAPE continued, no stanza break

beehive huts, the outline of an oratory,
inscribed stones still standing. Inside my cottage,
the upper back wall's a skylight facing the side
of the hillock. Birds fly in and out its rock clefts.
A cow with lichen-colored haunches pauses
on the high ridge. Here's where I've come to write.

*

Oh, so much rain over the row of desolate
stone cottages along the narrow road oh, so
close to the cliffs' edge. The harrowing possible
holds me back. Late October. The locals repeat,
Winter's approaching. The long loneliness
of cold, low clouds, blowing gales, evening's slow spread
of shadows by 3 o'clock. Look, I chose to return,
knowing it's not the cliffs' edge I need fear. It's isolation
no one survives. But I believe no soul does
without some. That's the narrow road I walk
the days of my long stay here. Off to the west,
polar air ever colliding with the warm
Gulf Stream, so this endless rain. But also rainbows
with huge distinct arches. Each of the three
I've seen has had an echo, so double rainbows.

*

The X on the new legend outside the ruins
of the abbey documents *Anseo Atá Tú*,
You Are Here at the entrance into the sacred
universe of ancient monks. Verses of psalms,
their music against a backdrop of winds that fuel
the fuming sea here at a bay's brutal edge.
A rain-filled seemingly useless life, its endless
ritual of manual labor, clearing the endless
rocks and roots in pursuit of the most elemental.
Pared-down plain chant, conduit to the beyond.
Or tribute to these numinous surroundings.
For here, even rain can be translucent as the few,
far shafts falling way out on the horizon show.
This enclosure, a place they were not to leave,
place of extreme beauty where their Rule set them
on a perpetual journey. X. I am here
at a measureless entrance in union with them.